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It has always known, and we have always been 'other': Knowing capitalism and the 'coming crisis' of sociology confront the concentration system and Mass-Observation

Liz Stanley

Abstract

It has been suggested that the contemporary form of capitalism – knowing capitalism – is distinctively different from its earlier incarnations by being 'knowing' in unprecedented ways; and that there is a 'coming crisis of empirical sociology', because related technological developments are producing a leading-edge research infrastructure located firmly within knowing capitalism, rather than in academic social science. These arguments are counter-posed here through two case studies. Thinking over the longer run via these suggests that 'it has always known' and sociologists 'have always been "other"', and that the current situation is not as new as is claimed. The first case study concerns the reverberations of the South African War (1899–1902) and particularly the 'concentration system' and its knowledge-based and generating classification, measurement and disposition of groups of people. The second case study concerns the post-World War Two impact of wartime changes in the configuration of research and knowledge on Mass-Observation, a radical social science research organization on the borders and 'other' to institutionalised sociology.

Introduction¹

It has been speculatively suggested that the now-contemporary form of capitalism – knowing capitalism – is distinctively different from its earlier incarnations by being 'knowing' in unprecedented ways (Thrift, 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006; Thrift and French, 2002; Graham and Thrift, 2007). For Thrift, this new knowingness of capitalism is linked to advanced technologies now permeating all aspects of social life. Rather than perceiving finance, IT and new forms of property statically, the focus is on their discursive aspects and inter-linkages with the networks and cultural circuits of 'soft capitalism'; it is also on the resulting novel organizational forms and innovative working

practices, which are remaking positionality by reconfiguring notions of time and standardizing understandings of space. And taking off from these broad ideas, such developments have been seen as producing a leading-edge research infrastructure located within knowing capitalism, not academic social science (Savage and Burrows, 2007, drawing on Osborne and Rose, 2004; Rose, 1990; Bowker and Star, 1999 and others). Savage and Burrows suggest that the mushrooming of different forms of research expertise occurring within knowing capitalism has led to sociology being no longer located at the apex but, instead, being one of the 'others' of knowledge production. This is because the research infrastructure is co-extensive with knowing capitalism's 'soft' dimensions and has access to data and research tools of unprecedented sophistication. Possible ways of responding to the resulting 'coming crisis' of empirical sociology, which they sketch out, include decentring causal analysis and a politics of method which focuses instead on description and classification.

Thinking about the short-run and the here-and-now, these speculative arguments are persuasive. Yes, things *are* changing at a rapid pace and the nature of consumption/production is being reconfigured in the first world/the north and, through knock-on effects, globally, too. Yes, large corporations do employ social researchers in many research-related roles who do work that might previously have been done within the discipline. And yes, sociology does need a thoughtful, empirically-grounded and sensibly theorised response. However, focusing on the longer run and using some 'there and then' historical case studies to explore these ideas more closely – as the rest of this discussion does – suggests the conclusion signalled in my title: 'it has always known' and sociologists 'have always been "other"', with the current situation being by no means as new and different as is claimed.

In arguing this, I refer to two long-term research projects I have been engaged with, regarding earlier important 'moments' during which the configurations of capital, the state and knowledge production were re-worked. The first concerns the reverberations of the South African War (1899–1902) for a vastly increased speed and reach of knowledge collection, transfer, analysis and use within an imperial project that connected India and southern Africa to each other and to the British imperial metropolis. Knowing imperialism here was linked to a knowing state, via a range of quasi-governmental and quasi-military organizations rapidly put into place 'on the ground'. This case study is explored by particular reference to my research on the 'concentration system'.² The second concerns equally significant changes to the configuration of research and knowledge which occurred around World War II and the establishment in the UK of a government-sponsored research culture that produced a cohort of technically highly proficient social researchers and epistemologically new ideas outwith academia. This will be discussed regarding my research on Mass-Observation, a radical social science research organization located on the borders of academia, around complexly-changing ideas about not only what was/not good research but also what were/not politically radical research methodologies.³

The South African war and the 'concentration system'

The South African War, provoked by Britain, encouraged and to an extent indeed occasioned a greatly increased capacity for knowledge collection, analysis, transfer and use, around an imperial project which connected southern Africa to India and the British imperial metropolis via interventionist quasi-governmental and quasi-military wartime organizations operating 'on the ground'. Knowing capitalism in its imperialist mode at this temporal juncture included the establishment in South Africa of a system of censorship, compelled informing and martial law, and the routine surveillance of telegrams and post. The specific aspect I have researched in detail and will comment on here is the 'concentration system', run by a combination of the British military, imperial officials and crisis-imported bureaucrats, many of whom had been in imperial service in India previously. The 'concentration system' centred around the disposition of black labour and the sequestering of Boer loyalists; and it provided the organizational machinery that underpinned a sophisticated knowledge production process which linked many local sites to the central bureaucracy in each of the annexed formerly independent Boer states of the Transvaal and Orange Free State (OFS). In doing so, it worked closely with local variants of capitalism in its imperial phase across southern Africa, and rapidly conveyed its knowledge products to the imperial metropolis and its interlinked 'home and abroad' governmental apparatus.

This points to a considerable drive 'to know' which brought together 'local' imperial governance, military organization, bureaucratic apparatuses, the control and deployment of labour, and the collection and analysis of mass data underpinned by the classification of head-counts of people, their rations, diseases and deaths or recoveries. The backcloth and source of this was the informational as well as surveillant and regulatory state which operated in the imperial metropolis. The state in England, then the Union, then the UK, has been an information-based one since the 1500s (Higgs, 2004), with late nineteenth century developments in capitalism, the extension of imperialism, and the organizational requirements which the South African War entailed, all combining to extend massively the state apparatus of 'knowing'. This importantly included the circulation of 'knowing technologies' from one colony to another via the imperial centre, with examples here concerning the regulation of Chinese and other 'coloured' migrant labour, the development of plague-control mechanisms, and the institution of colony-wide censuses for information gathering, all of which were 'exported' around Britain's colonies (Lake and Reynolds, 2008). Many interesting aspects of these wartime developments come into sight, using Thrift's and Savage and Burrow's arguments as a broad framework.

Once an imperial 'quick fix' military response failed to produce capitulation by the Boer Republics, an unprecedented set of interventions occurred in civil society and 'ordinary life', not just militarily. These included martial law, censorship and an extensive system of compelled informing across the whole

country, not just frontline areas. Their extensiveness in dissolving distinctions between civilians and combatants is indicated by, for instance, various English-speaking Cape politicians being placed under house arrest for encouraging peace moves, and executions of non-combatant Boer men based on evidence provided by compelled informing. This system of surveillance and censorship in the context of what was, in effect, total war encompassed the activities of journalists and politicians, including those who were pro-British, regarding their internal-to-South-Africa as well as external communications. Telegrams as well as post were subject to detailed surveillance, and propaganda was routinely provided as 'factual information'.

Rapid forms of new knowledge production and management were also generated. Regarding the concentration camps, extensive centrally-overseen records from these supported a predictive approach which enabled, for instance, the effective purchase of food, equipment and supplies (tents, bedding, candles, medicines...). It also enabled camp populations to be 'known', and once known then shaped, by moving people around the system so as, in organizational terms, to manage it better. For instance, the headquarters' processing of local camp records enabled 'trouble-makers' to be identified, and over time many people so dubbed were sent to the camps furthest from the fighting to prevent contact with the Boer commandos. A system of informing was organized, within the camps as well as other areas of the country, drawing another large number of people into the processes and products of official knowledge-making. This, coupled with martial law, censorship and propagandising, instituted a system of knowledge management and control which took a remarkably totalising view of 'the war'.

Different kinds of organizational space and place resulted, around large-scale population movements and their sequestering in camps; the commandeering of white labour within these; the commandeering and dispersal of black labour elsewhere in the system as support workers in other war-created spaces, such as blockhouses, front-lines, stables and hospitals; and virtual spaces such as 'relief camps' in Pretoria and Johannesburg, which were not camps at all but a means of distributing rations to people in their homes. There was also eventually the managed dissolution of these wartime spaces/places, which created some other equally managed spaces elsewhere, with some elements of this apparatus for practical knowledge production and use continuing post-war in somewhat different incarnations. For instance, black labour working in so-called white camps often had no 'roots' to return to post-war and these people then formed the basis of 'locations' around white towns and *dorps*;⁴ and the separate Native Refugee Department instituted in August 1901 morphed post-war into the Department of Native Affairs.

A knowledge-producing infrastructure was instituted at each local concentration camp level, with each of these reporting to the headquarters level in each annexed colony; these were the Chief Superintendent of Refugee Camps Department in the Orange Free State and the Director of Burger Camps Department in the Transvaal. This was to underpin rationing and provisioning,

not only because many camps were in places where obtaining regular supplies was difficult or impossible, but also because their populations were classified and differentiated. Initially there were different levels of rations for Boer loyalists and other people, and throughout for children and adults; this was overseen at imperial level, as was its financing. At camp level, weekly counts of population (both black and white) were summarised into monthly averages and 'returned' to headquarters, impacting directly on the provision of stores for the next month. Numbers of incoming and outgoing people were detailed, with separate information provided on the destination of those going outwards. A parallel system of returning counts of births, deaths and marriages to headquarters also existed; and alongside this, all cases of reported illness were recorded using data provided by the camp doctors making their rounds and the camp hospitals dealing with in-patients. Initially less frequently, then later monthly, statistical overviews of all this information were relayed to increasingly controlling imperial agencies in the metropolis, including the General Register Office (GRO). Two interesting instances of this impacted directly on record-keeping at camp and annexed colony levels around how information was to be recorded; they show that this knowledge production and collection apparatus concerned knowledge for use rather than its own sake.

The first example occurred around death rates in the camps increasing due to waves of epidemics of measles, diarrhoea, dysentery, diphtheria, influenza and pneumonia, and concerned how the deaths of children who had suffered a succession of illnesses should be recorded. As well as their other illnesses, many of these children 'faded away', becoming more and more skeletal before dying. The camp doctors were instructed not to write death notices using terms such as 'marasmus',⁵ 'debility' and 'wasting', but only scientific ones based on recently-approved medical diagnostic categories. Many of the doctors were mystified as to why these child deaths occurred in the way they did, with their recording practices reflecting the complexity of what they observed first-hand. The imposed changes, however, removed these local knowledges based on description and replaced them with technical categories which brought the doctors into line and were also politically expedient, with both the GRO and the medical establishment supporting this. The second example concerns the requirement instituted in July 1901 that the two annexed colonies should record and return information in exactly the same way. This in part followed what was seen as best practice in India, but in part occurred because of knowledge production factors, with official correspondence emphasising that the statistical analyses being carried out by imperial governmental organizations required this conformity.

What is striking about the South African situation, as it eventuated by early 1902, is that these administrative and knowledge production apparatuses operated as a system of organization and control which enabled forethought and planning, rather than having any pre-set end goal, like 'achieving peace', for instance. The post-war policies later pursued by High Commissioner Milner were equally future-oriented and open-ended, concerned with ensuring South

Africa remained British-controlled and thus a compliant part of the imperial project.

This system had local, extra-local and also marked cross-colony dimensions. The organizational developments just sketched out rapidly followed on from each other, not least because personnel, from the humblest clerks from the smallest camps to the most senior colony-level administrators, moved around the system, taking organizational and tacit 'how it actually works' knowledge with them and often using this in the new contexts they moved into. Thus, for instance, a very efficient administrator of a concentration camp school was promoted sideways to become superintendent of a major camp, a particularly effective superintendent was promoted to travelling inspector of camps, plague doctors from India were drafted into Transvaal and OFS camp hospitals, and senior Indian army officers also from plague areas replaced the colony-level controllers. These positions (and many more) were 'postings' within an organizational system, a connected set of labour forces which were almost as shaped and deployed as the camp populations: rather like an international business, specific occupational divisions both existed and were frequently traversed in favour of the more effective use of 'smart' labour power.

These organizational structures and processes seem surprisingly 'modern' regarding their use of then leading-edge technologies, including the telephone, telegraph, portable cameras, organizational record-keeping and purpose-designed classificatory systems, statistical analyses of resultant data, and the deployment of all these for surveillance, censorship and propaganda purposes that dissolved 'usual' divisions in the population. The disjuncture between such things and the, in some respects, uncivil 'pre-modern' war being waged alongside them is all the more notable. The advanced imperial technologies of warfare, including a huge army presence, fared badly against 'old' pre-modern Boer military knowledges, based on knowing the land and adapting to it. However, it was less a matter of the uncivil periphery in South Africa, and more a matter of the uncivil imperial centre provoking the war and invading independent states. The modern state at that time was heavily invested in its imperial activity (and not just Britain – the war between the US and Japan, and German and French competitor activities in southern Africa, come readily to mind), and it centred and deployed the 'uncivil war' as a prime means of extending and maintaining its reach.

What of then-contemporary sociology in this? The leading social commentators providing analytical accounts of the war's origins and aftermaths – Olive Schreiner (1899) and John Hobson (1900, 1902) – were 'other' to institutional social science as well as to governmental and related knowledge-producing agencies.⁶ Both were anti-establishment figures and both analysed and theorised on the basis of grounded local knowledges.⁷ As a family, the Hobhouses opposed the South African War, Emily Hobhouse in relation to the concentration camps, her brother, the sociologist Leonard Hobhouse, through working for the *Manchester Guardian* from 1893 to 1903 before returning to academic life in 1907, when he was appointed to Britain's first Chair of

Sociology at the London School of Economics. Leonard Hobhouse's *Guardian* contributions, although not always easy to identify, are thoughtful and sensible, although it is notable that, unlike his colleague Hobson, he did not connect his sociology analytically to his opposition to the war.

Britain had no sociology journals until the *Sociological Review* was founded in 1908, so establishing in any great detail the UK discipline's responses to the war is difficult. However, exploring the *American Journal of Sociology* from 1899 to 1914 shows that wide-ranging discussions of the configuration and concerns of the discipline, such as Lester Ward's (1902) 'Contemporary Sociology', Georg Simmel's (1904) 'Sociology of Conflict' and George Vincent's (1911) 'Rivalry of social groups', fail to mention let alone discuss the South African War. The most relevant contribution over this period is a discussion of the North Sleswic war, which uses the South African War as an example of divided public opinion about opposing claims (Warming, 1902).⁸

Overall, the South African War gave rise to local/imperial organizations producing data-products on an immense scale to which academic social scientists had no access; and while these mainly took the form of counts and surfaces, there were hotly contested meanings to the War and the concentration system which surfaced elsewhere than in sociology, such as in social commentary and 'serious' journalism as well as anti-war movements in Britain and elsewhere in Europe as well as South Africa.⁹ There was considerable (in both senses of the word) research activity involved, strongly informed by workaday needs and rules of thumb with some advanced analytical techniques being used in analysis, and this was fed back to and impacted on knowledge production 'on the ground'. Sociology was 'other' to these imperial and colonial state apparatuses for knowledge production, and also to informed analytical social commentary by Schreiner and Hobson.

There were important methodological innovations happening around this, particularly concerning the design, handling and analysis of large-scale numerical data and high-level statistical techniques. There were equally innovative theoretical contributions from Schreiner and Hobson in linking imperialism, capitalism, the role of finance capital in southern Africa, under-consumption at home and war economies. The work of both was based on detailed investigations of local manifestations of broad social structures and forces and made use of what Ward (1902) called a 'descriptive sociology' approach. And academic sociology at this time was both 'other' to the methodological and theoretical action and also immersed in intra-disciplinary matters regarding the concerns of professional sociology.

Mass-observation from Churchtown to Little Kinsey

At least equally significant changes to the configuration of research and knowledge occurred around WWII, and important for discussion here changing conceptions of 'proper research'. Over the course of the war, a government-

employed research culture was established, producing a cohort of technically proficient social researchers able to use advanced technologies for engaging with volume data using mechanised means of handling and analysing it. Post-war, some of its members remained in government posts, while others moved into a variety of research organizations, from market research bodies to 'think-tank' type organizations such as PEP (Political and Economic Planning), and also universities. The social research organization Mass-Observation (M-O) was one of them. Around a 1949 project, 'Little Kinsey', and the earlier ingress of wartime government-trained social researchers with very different ideas about method and methodology, it changed from a radical alternative social science into a market research organization.

Mass-Observation came into being in the later 1930s facing in two, oppositional, directions; towards market research and opinion-polling and towards analytical social science. Its radical approach to how social science should be done was linked to two ideas: first there should be an 'anthropology of ourselves' in which the 'we' involved were both mass-observers and also the observed and second that people – including observers producing research – should be conceived as 'subjective cameras' and their ways of seeing and interpreting taken into account, as well as the observations they made and the facts they produced. Inside the organization, M-O created a new kind of flexible knowledge-producing space, which was both the literal one of changing flows of people and organizational roles between 'headquarters and observers', and a virtual one regarding the temporal, spatial and interpersonal locations of the observations and descriptions that observers produced. Outside it, in the context of reactions from public opinion and market research organizations and by mainstream university-based social science, it was very much a case of business as usual.

There was considerable suspicion of M-O's unconventional research stance and methods, which broke the conventions of both sectors, but (unaccountably for those who worked in them) also produced more accurate forecasts of social behaviour on diverse topics from wartime air-raid defence measures and saving and spending patterns to sexual behaviour and the post-war birth-rate. Its approach was very much one of 'knowledge for . . .', instrumentally carrying out paid market research work to fund its wider research activities, and seeing its long-term aim as constituting a synthetic social science containing sociology, anthropology, political science and economics. However, after 1939 this changed.

A schism occurred in M-O in 1939–40 concerning divergent views about what its relationship to the wartime state and its research-commissioning powers and notions of useful knowledge should be; this led to a fracturing of its activities and organizational structures. In the later 1930s, sociology and other university-based social science formed the centre to which M-O saw itself as 'other'. In practice, however, the situation was more complex and fluid. M-O also saw itself as an alternative sociology with a more effective approach, and two of its founders, Harrisson and Madge, had contacts with influential members of the academic establishment and also governmental and publish-

ing bodies who acted as sponsors and sources of funding, research contracts and publication possibilities.¹⁰ In part, however, M-O's relationship with academic social science was problematic because it was more immediately successful in influencing policy-making bodies, and this gave rise to negative commentary from some UK academics due to their feeling that they might be positioned as 'other' to this other.

During the war, many former M-O staff worked in state research organizations, importantly but not exclusively the Wartime Social Survey, and were trained in representative sample survey methods. Others working in the same research bodies heard about M-O, and in the post-war social research context some people gravitated to it. They were attracted more to its populist market research than its 'descriptive' activities because of the possibilities it created of using the analytical techniques and technologies they had been trained in. In 1949, further changes occurred around the differences between 'early M-O' and its new staff with their radical positivist ideas about the importance of scientific quantitative methods for investigating and remaking Britain post-war. Its research approach shifted considerably over the course of a particular research project, 'Little Kinsey', with these changes pointing up its changing relationship to the array of private and non-governmental research organizations active in this period and also to university-based social science.

In the wake of the Kinsey Report, the *Sunday Pictorial* had commissioned some M-O research which eventuated in a 1949 series of newspaper articles, and also an incomplete book manuscript, 'Little Kinsey'. Starting as a 'directive' setting out a programme for an observational study of public courting and sexual behaviour in 'Churchtown' and some comparisons with 'Steeltown', supported by local statistics and interviews concerning opinions about sexual morality, it eventuated as a national representative sample survey and two smaller more focused surveys, albeit with the unfinished manuscript bearing some signs of 'early M-O's' observational style and descriptive/predictive concerns. Of particular interest for present discussion is why this about-turn occurred and how it involved a combination of internal and external factors.

By the end of World War II many of the 'early M-O' staff, including its founders Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings, and some key members of its headquarters who had analysed its directives and acted as its 'writers', pulling together diverse observations into coherent descriptive analyses, had become completely or semi-detached from it. Alongside this, many 'new M-O' staff had track-records in the government Wartime Social Survey (indeed, post-war, a former mass-observer, Geoffrey Thomas, became its Director), and shared its ideas about random sampling and representativeness and related techniques for statistical analysis; M-O's then-office manager Mollie Tarrant was among them. At the point when 'Little Kinsey' started, the office had invested in a Powers computer and had staff members who were highly competent in survey and related research and keen to display its advantages, and it seems that, over the life of the project and by incremental stages, the interest in using local official statistics and interviews changed to produc-

ing national sample survey data to be analysed by machine methods. Later, in 1949, M-O became a market research organization, Mass-Observation Ltd, in which none of its founder-members retained an involvement. In the post-war period, opinion poll and market research organizations were pioneering the use of random sampling methods and computer-based data handling and analysis and the radicals in M-O saw random sampling methods as transparent, open and effective. But the relationship between any social research centre and its 'others' was even more complicated, with Geoffrey Thomas at the Government Social Survey being by no means the only 'early M-O' social researcher who retooled and re-grouped, as some other examples will suggest.

Sergeant Florence and Keynes became mentors for Charles Madge. At Keynes's suggestion, and initially in the context of M-O's Worktown 'Economics of Everyday Life' (EEL) project, in 1939 Madge developed research on patterns of saving and spending. Between 1940 and 1942 Madge worked for the National Council for Social and Economic Research and extended this research. In 1943 he moved, to direct PEP, in 1944 becoming a director of Pilot Press, which published sociological essays by non-academics. In 1947 he became Social Development Officer for Stevenage New Town, then in 1950 Birmingham's first chair of sociology, with Sergeant Florence (a Birmingham professor of economics) still something of a mentor. Madge's doubts about the validity of mainstream sociology as it then stood continued, with his own work being partly more socially radical and philosophical (with a book on the social *eidos*) and partly more empirically grounded, including projects on planning and on inner-city poverty with Peter Willmott.

Gertrude Wagner, an Austrian associated with the Marienthal project and Marie Jahoda, worked on the 'Men Without Work' project funded by the Pilgrim Trust and then with Madge on the EEL project.¹¹ An economic sociologist, her 1939 London PhD was on 'Saving and Spending in Worktown', while in 1940 she was at the University of Liverpool researching the wartime evacuation of children, followed by a range of university- and social research organization-based posts before returning in 1948 to Austria to work as an analyst on social matters for its national bank. Dennis Chapman had worked with Seeborn Rowntree on his 1930s York poverty study and then with Oscar Oeser at the University of St. Andrews, where he was funded by the Pilgrim Trust to study unemployment among ex-jute workers in Dundee. Through Oeser, whose 'functional penetration' approach to fieldwork was a great influence on Harrison and Madge, he then worked with Madge and Wagner on the EEL project, where they were later joined by Geoffrey Thomas, mentioned earlier. Chapman's social research career was equally varied post-EEL, working on new town planning projects and poverty research, and then at the University of Liverpool business school publishing on topics such as the class-based use of space in people's homes.

The hostility to M-O from some university-based social scientists noted above was, then, matched by interest and sponsorship from others; and some of the researchers associated with M-O had earlier and/or later university

careers while others moved into social research in government or NGO or business contexts. Obviously the social sciences, sociology among them, did not stand still over this period either. However, the hostility to M-O did not end. Thus, for instance, Mark Abrams's (1951) savage dismissal of M-O, partly fuelled by his involvement in a rival market research organization, was influential on sociologists through to the 1980s. When editor of *Sociology* and reading back through its records, for instance, I found that in the 1950s and 60s it had been enough to damn an article when a reviewer commented it was 'very M-O' and cited Abrams in support.

Scrutinising M-O's changing borders and the movements of its research staff suggests that a core/periphery way of thinking about what is the centre and what is 'other' can mask, at least in periods of rapid change, considerable back and forth flows of personnel between different kinds of social research organizations. Sociology was the core regarding some aspects of social research for M-O, a contending client periphery in relation to others, and also a source of employment that social researchers moved into but might in some ways still see themselves as 'other' to. 'Otherness' at this juncture seems to have been more a matter of a particular situationally-specific temporal 'moment' and frames of mind than a fixed relation. Alongside this, it is notable that it was 'early M-O' that entered even though it may not have been assimilated into the academy at this point. The modern sample survey within sociology was to an extent discontinuous with older approaches, which many M-O staff had been involved in too; and its percolation into the academy came via such extra-academic bodies as Gallop and the recruits to the Government Social Survey (Bulmer *et al.*, 1991).

The techniques and technologies of what was considered vast, rapid and leading-edge were also subject to change of a by no means simple or uni-directional kind. Repeated border-crossing by many M-O staff meant that 'early M-O's' interest in close descriptive classification, often carried out on large-scale projects and considerable volumes of data (as with the EEL project), was taken into a variety of social research contexts during and post-war, with older ideas about social surveying thereby surviving albeit in a changed form. There was certainly a long summer in sociology for the representative sample survey subsequently. However, and starting in its heyday, many sociological proponents reworked its form to ensure that there was descriptive depth to such work and it could deal with meanings as well as counts, while more recently others have taken counts back to, for example, actual household relationships and specific persons and the narratives they provide (Elliott, 2005).

Who knows what?

Some of the question marks to be placed over arguments about knowing capitalism and an associated crisis for contemporary sociology have already

been signalled. In relation to the South African War, many of the 'new' flexible knowing and learning structures seen as part of the distinctiveness of late twentieth/early twenty-first century knowing capitalism are in fact discernible a century earlier in connection with the extra-military activities happening tsunami-like in connection with this war. In relation to M-O and changes occurring in the wake of WWII, as well as the concentration system and the South African War, the 'other' status of the sociology of the day can be seen. 'The action' regarding the structures and outputs of knowledge production in both case studies was located elsewhere, with sociology an eventual recipient of the methodological and conceptual effects, rather than a prime mover in producing these.

The place of sociology in the academy was obviously very different in 1899–1902 compared with 1949 (although with hindsight at both points it was poised for expansion). However, its role in relation to both of these 'moments' in the reconfiguration of knowledge production was demonstrably 'other'. The methodological and analytical innovations that occurred during both 'moments' came largely from people and organizational structures outwith institutional social sciences, and which had different relationships with the state and its knowledge apparatus. Sociology was of course not entirely divorced from such changes, but its relationship was on the periphery and responsive. The view I have been advancing, then, is that 'it has always known', and sociology 'has always been "other"', But what more precisely is the 'it' here? For Thrift and for Savage and Burrows, 'it' is assumed as knowing capitalism, the stage or state of capitalism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, I want to suggest that 'it' was rather more complexly constituted in relation to both case studies discussed here.

Around the South African War, 'it' involved governance in the imperial metropolis, local profit-seeking imperialists and their on-the-ground expansionist activities, local colonial/settler states which opposed the imperial centre, finance capitalism, and a range of bureaucratic organizations which were complexly related to these and whose circulating elites imported sophisticated structures and practices for data collection, processing and analysis and transferred the results to the imperial centre. Around M-O and its internal changes, 'it' involved the changing relationship of M-O and other research organizations to government, notions of science and methodological innovation, the place of the mainstream social sciences in the universities, and the role of ideas, organizations and pressure groups seen as 'other' in relation to such things. And regarding both, 'it' centred on the 'information state' and its changes and developments over time, including but by no means exclusively in relation to capitalism. The 'information state' has been a long-term significant presence in the UK and has impacted in many ways on the structures and technologies of information and knowledge production. This is not least because of its institution of a large knowledge-producing bureaucracy as a core part of its apparatus of governance, extended to facilitate England's ruling relationship to its neighbours in the

British Isles, to its imperial 'possessions', and more ambiguously the settler colonies it spawned or took over. Many of these ways of organizing, working and ruling were disrupted, challenged, mediated and otherwise changed because of World War II and its multiple impacts, of which the reworking of new survey technologies in the service of social change and, because lacking the arcane features of earlier approaches, as a populist way forward is but one example.

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are a time of rapid technological and other change, and it is tempting to see such developments as always the causal product of capitalism and its productive spaces. It is a temptation that should be resisted, however! Other periods of rapid change and innovative development with regard to the technologies of knowing can be identified which were brought about by different sets of factors, including wars and their aftermaths. Wars, especially of the totalising kind that occurred in South Africa from 1899 to 1902 and also, of course, during World War II, bring with them rapid change, indeed widespread upheaval, and the equally rapid development of responsive organizational forms and working practices around knowing, so as to enable a greater measure of understanding and control. The concentration system in South Africa and the Wartime Social Survey and Mass-Observation in the UK provide very different but equally interesting examples of this, by showing that war-occasioned periods of rapid change provide important counter-examples to technologically-driven periods of change.

These examples also convey the simple but important point that the nature, extent, rapidity and uniqueness of change and innovation are perceived in and should be measured in the context of the times: they are not absolutes. The scale, innovativeness and social consequences of new technological and organizational developments that are now, in the early 2000s, being linked with knowing capitalism are matched by those which contemporaries in the 1900s and the later 1940s associated with the changes then occurring. This included, for instance, in relation to the first case study, steam transport, the postal service, the telegraph, stock exchange, promissory notes and credit arrangements, the telephone, the box brownie camera, smokeless bullets, the Maxim gun and dynamite, and the coding and censorship of information, not to mention the exploitation and expropriation of land, minerals and people that followed capitalism in its imperialist mode in southern Africa. And these in turn supported and furthered the late nineteenth and early twentieth century flowering of finance capitalism as it impacted on governance, politics, organizational forms and bureaucratic structures. Capitalism, then, does not exist in a vacuum and nor does it provide the totality of social structure; it is complexly related to cognate forms and structures of governance (not just government); and there are good reasons for keeping firmly in mind its relationship to national and imperial states, to less easily classified forms of governance on the borders of these, and to governmental and non-governmental bureaucracies and their roles in knowledge production.

The relationship of sociology and the other social sciences to governance and government has of course changed over time. However, sociology has been demonstrably 'other', rather than a major player in the developments sketched out regarding both case studies. Methodological, technological, epistemological and other innovations in knowing which happened during these 'moments' came largely from outwith the academy and sociology, even though contemporaneously there have been various hindsight attempts to colonise and incorporate such things as the critique of imperialism (by Schreiner and Hobson among others), the development of a radical alternative sociology (by Mass-Observation) and the 'invention' of reformer-researchers using quantitative and survey methods (in the survey organizations proliferating in the post-1945 period), as 'really' part of the discipline.

The core argument advanced here is that knowledge production is in important ways the handmaiden, not of knowing capitalism, nor the state, nor quasi-governmental and bureaucratic organizations, but rather of the context-specific configurations of these and related structures which responsively come into being in particular times and places. These things also have long after-maths for the organizational structures, methodological tools and working practices of sociology and its research, not least because they shape how knowledge is defined, where its production is located, and who its progenitors are seen to be. Regarding the case studies discussed here – concerning imperial v. colonial power and local forms of finance capital, and regarding the post-war expansionist welfare state and new ideas about democratically-open research methodologies in remaking the social order – sociology in its institutional form was clearly 'other' and marginal to the generation of knowledge and the development of innovations. Not only was war, rather than technology, the immediate catalyst for change in relation to both, but it was sociology's 'others' of a range of (sometimes opposing) kinds that were the source of innovative topics, methodologies, working practices and knowledge outputs, not sociology itself.

Seeing my case studies as *the* alternative archaeology/genealogy of sociology should be resisted, because of course multiple counter-examples exist, not least regarding the lost or suppressed genealogy of women in sociology from its foundations on. However, their juxtaposition points up that they were at either extreme regarding institutional sociology, the one a kind of state reason materialised in the particular circumstances of total war in South Africa, the other a populist form originating as a constituent part of methodologically-advanced technologies for knowledge production and governance. Consequently I *am* suggesting that they provide important counter-cases, by demonstrating that many 'new', 'innovative', 'rapid' and 'technologically leading-edge' qualities seen as characterising knowing capitalism now were in fact present during and had a massive impact on all aspects of knowledge production in both of these historical 'moments', and they conditioned how the scale and pace of innovation and change were perceived within them.

Notes

- 1 My thanks to *The Sociological Review's* referees for helpful suggestions in reworking this discussion.
- 2 The research I have carried out on this is detailed in Stanley, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006. Work influencing my own thinking about the war and its consequences includes Cuthbertson *et al.*, 2002; Lowry, 2000; Nasson, 1999; Smith, 1995 and especially Spies, 1977; and on organisational and informational flows and regarding the South Africa/India connections and the metropolis, among others I draw on Bayly, 1996; Cohn, 1996; Dirks, 2001, but particularly my own archival research. The research and analysis supporting the argument here is referenced at the start of this footnote.
- 3 My research here is detailed in Stanley, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1996, 2001. Other useful work on Mass-Observation includes Calder and Sheridan, 1984; Highmore, 2002; Hubble, 2006; Sheridan, 1993, although principally I draw on my own archival research. As with the earlier discussion of the concentration system, the research and analysis supporting the argument here will be found in the references commencing this footnote.
- 4 A dorp is a village in the back of beyond sense.
- 5 Marasmus still kills many malnourished children in Africa and India and is a kind of rogue abscessing cancer that eats away the jawbone, nose etc. It emanates from diseased tooth roots and without antibiotics kills rapidly.
- 6 During the war Schreiner was on the receiving end of the system of surveillance, censorship and martial law that was instituted (Stanley, 2002).
- 7 While Schreiner was influenced by Spencer as a young woman, she had discarded his mechanistic and abstracted approach by the later 1880s; and as an economist producing theories of under-consumption and imperialism, Hobson worked outside of academic economics including as the *Manchester Guardian's* South African correspondent.
- 8 Using the JSTOR collections, this 1 in sociology compares with >50 fairly detailed discussions in political science, >45 in Law, >20 in history, >10 in nursing studies, >10 in economics and >5 in statistics.
- 9 In which the leading social analysts Schreiner and Hobson also participated.
- 10 Including Malinowski, Pear, Jewkes, Oeser and Mary Adams at the BBC, who then became the government's director of home intelligence, and publisher Gollantz.
- 11 Wagner was also the key writer of M-O's *The Pub and the People*.

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